



Community Development Programs

Imperial County Enterprise Community (EC)

Imperial County, which shares a border with Mexico and is designated as a NAFTA impacted area, has the highest unemployment rate in the State. Included in the benefits the EC derived from its designation:

- A \$3.5 million Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan to fund a ten-screen movie theater project creating 15 - 20 new jobs.
- A \$99,000 Rural Business Enterprise Grant that will help create a university-based centralized database to maintain vital economic development information for distribution to existing and potential business, entrepreneurs, investors and other individuals seeking information about Imperial County.
- \$3.3 million in Rural Utilities Service combination loan and grant to help cover the cost of expanding the Heber Public Utilities District's wastewater treatment plant.
- Two \$100,000 Community Facilities grants to fund a warehouse distribution and storage facility for the local food pantry and a Public Safety Center that will house the fire department, sheriff and utilities' offices.

The EC sighted in its original strategic plan the lack of cultural and artistic activities. There was an underdeveloped arts center at the historic post office building in El Centro, the county seat. The Imperial County Arts Council saw the opportunity for a new vision of local arts and began a concerted effort to renovate the arts center and create new programs.

With \$50,000 from the EC's Social Service Block Grant, the Council rehabilitated the arts center, which is now home to four local theater companies. In addition, the funds have paid for a number of programs throughout the 4,400 square-mile county. A children's theater group has performed for 3,000; concerts in the county's parks have reached 2,500 people; and, the Smithsonian Institution has participated in innovative arts education programs.

In the Fall of 1999, the California Alliance for Arts Education (CAAE), which encourages local experimentation, broadened collaboration, focused research and arts education policy development, honored the Council for its standard in arts education partnerships.

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